

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6017

As Reported by House Committee On:
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to modifying general assistance provisions.

Brief Description: Modifying general assistance provisions.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Stevens and Hargrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 4/22/03 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to discontinue benefits to General Assistance - Unemployable recipients unless the recipient demonstrates no material improvement in his or her medical or mental condition at the incapacity review.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Cody, Conway, Dunshee, Grant, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McIntire, Miloscia, Ruderman and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Sehlin, Ranking Minority Member; Pearson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Boldt, Buck, Clements, Cox, DeBolt, McDonald, Pflug, Sump and Talcott.

Staff: Heather Flodstrom (786-7391).

Background:

General Assistance - Unemployable (GA-U) benefits are provided to people who are temporarily disabled and as a result cannot work. To be eligible for these benefits, a

client must undergo an incapacity review that proves the client temporarily disabled by a medical or mental condition. After a client is determined eligible for GA-U benefits, the client is required to have periodic incapacity reviews to ensure continued eligibility for the program.

Current law prohibits the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) from terminating a GA-U recipient's benefits unless there is a clear showing of material improvement in the recipient's medical or mental condition at the incapacity review.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The DSHS is required to discontinue benefits to GA-U recipients unless the recipient demonstrates no material improvement in his or her medical or mental condition at the incapacity review.

Amended Bill Compared to Second Substitute Bill:

The striking amendment requires the DSHS to discontinue benefits to GA-U recipients unless the recipient demonstrates no material improvement in his or her medical or mental condition at the incapacity review, rather than imposing time limits on GA-U recipients as in the underlying Senate bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Concerns) There is concern about how the DSHS will handle the GA-U clients when they come back for their follow-up review. There is a great deal of pressure on the DSHS to reach the budgeted level after budget cuts have been made, and they may potentially end up turning away clients who would be eligible for GA-U, because they need to reach a certain funding level. If the Legislature reduces the number of people on GA-U, they will likely show up in community based organizations or local government programs, which just shifts the costs to programs that are also suffering from budget deficits. Cuts to this program will mean more homelessness and greater hunger for vulnerable people, and will put an added strain on other organizations that are serving the GA-U population. This change will cut off those who are least likely to be able to prove their disability.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Donna Christensen, Washington State Catholic Conference; and Julie Watts, Washington Association of Churches.